variant
SUPPLEMENT

The Non Place Urban Realm

The following material represents responses to a series of artist/ political public forums presented at the South London Gallery (SLG), Peckham, London, August 1999, under the title *Non Place Urban Realm*. The aim of the project was, in the gallery's words, to "explore urban renewal in the city through art and cultural practices in the form of an Exhibition, Open Forum and reading Room."

The theme and issues involved were critical to the situation in South London itself, but also held a more widespread relevance with respect to aspects of inner city regeneration and gentrification in cities throughout Europe, particularly in terms of developments during the last decade.

The exhibition featured photographs and videotapes by three artists, from Spain, France and Ireland, respectively Marcelo Exposito, Marc Pataut and Paul O'Neill. That their work was not solely intended for gallery consumption was reflected in the way that emphasis was placed, during the exhibition, upon the discussion forums. Pataut's photographs were part of a long-term project initiated by the French group *Ne Pas Plier*, working with inhabitants of Le Terrain, an area of wasteland within Paris. Expositio's video, *October in the North: Storm from the Northwest*, was made in collaboration with, and distributed by educational and public institutions in the Basque region of Spain.

These particular 'artworks' were contextualised through discussion forums with Brian Holmes and Marcello Expositio, both of whom spoke about the local and historical determinants upon the work displayed in the gallery.

The 'reading room' acted as a temporary but open archive of underground journals, magazines and pamphlets, the majority of which engaged critically with urban space (*Inventory, Transgressions*, and the publications of the London Psychogeographical Association among others). Many of the speakers visiting the gallery on particular days added their texts, posters and slides to this space, thus allowing a temporal map of the overall project to accumulate in conjunction with the project's broader development.

The kingpin of the project was undoubtedly the open forum, with public discussions taking place every other day during a period of just under a fortnight. Events took the form of presentations by two speakers, followed by questions and discussion from the floor. Debates lasted, on occasion, well beyond the gallery's closing time, continuing in the street, pub, or cafe.

The following speakers contributed to *Non Place Urban Realm*: Anna Best (artist) and MUF Architects (artists'/architects' collective); Gustav Metzger (artist) and Jane Rendell (writer/researcher); Pavel Büchler (artist/professor) and Marcel Exposito (artist); Graham Harwood of *Mongrel* (cross-disciplinary media group) and *Fiambrera* (artists'/activists' group); John Jordan (artist/member of *Reclaim the Streets*) and Brian Holmes (activist, *Ne Pas Plier*).

Non Place Urban Realm was curated by Montse Romani, who attempted to realise a new model of exhibition: less a presentation of finished artwork than a process of discussion, exchange and engagement. Put simply, she responded to the question: "How can the gallery be used by independent and potentially radical cultural practitioners?" This openness of approach was reflected in the different ways the gallery was actually employed by the various speakers: to present previous projects, test untried ideas, to debate specific, closely targeted topics or themes.

For many, the project encoded in *Non Place Urban Realm* was an important forum and meeting point for practices which, in essence, share various political concerns and territories: these are socially-engaged, artistic-cultural practices that find their own forms of reception and exchange within the totality of everyday life. Many of these practices are emphatically collaborative in intent and action, drawing upon collective endeavour, on dialogue and participation, in order to realise, recognise, and develop their consciously critical work.

The 'Non-Place' as Critical Site

Anthony Iles, Craig Martin, Peter Suchin

Anthony Iles: In a way both the show and the discussion forums were problematic, because we were talking about radical practice with a complicit awareness of the kind of space we were in [the SLG], but also an almost unspoken agreement to not actually deal with this.

Peter Suchin: There did seem to be a kind of convention of agreement as to what those areas that should be challenged were.

Craig Martin: The reason behind this being that you are not going to achieve anything if you critique the very structure you are in, in terms of the power structure of the gallery itself. Particularly as the time available for discussion is so short. Hopefully some of the pieces to be published might begin to look at this problem of the institution, as well as refer to what took place on the day.

PS: Because there's something about setting up a series of talks in a gallery and actually marketing them as political or radical talks that appears to be merely a letting-off of steam. We can have this little space within culture to criticise culture, but then it's back to all the little aesthetic things.

AI: I don't think that is the case, I think there was a sense of urgency in connection with the fact that all these people had managed to get to this space at the same time and were quite up for engaging in a debate about ongoing artistic and political practices, exchanging views with each other and interested in hearing particular people speak.

PS: It could have been that it wasn't a spurious situation (a nice, politicised discussion in the gallery and then it's off back to our everyday lives). People actually want to find within our culture different values than those we normally see foregrounded. This is why at least some of those talks were well attended and why there was a lot of audience input, with some extremely intelligent points being made.

AI: A lot of the practices under discussion aren't gallery based, and don't depend upon the gallery in order to find a mode of reception or mediation. They occur in other spaces and through other means. In this case, an institutional space was turned into something useful in terms of providing a space for intelligent, public debate.

This general openness was also encouraged by the way some people attended several of the events, so that you would see the same people at different forums, even though these dealt with entirely different topics. And also the way that different speakers approached their presentations—Brian Holmes of *Ne Pas Plier* (NPP) literally acting as the host, passing around the microphone, this particular discussion being one of the most relaxed I ever attended, with the speakers sitting on the floor, members of the audience sitting in the speaker's chair, and Holmes emphasising that anyone who wanted to could have their chance to speak.

PS: There seemed to me to be a big difference between the two speakers present, though Holmes had obviously talked publicly about NPP before (it felt, on one level, quite rehearsed) his presentation had an openness about it which was absent from John Jordan's talk of *Reclaim the Streets* (RTS). The latter showed great enthusiasm for the things he discussed, for RTS' practice generally. But this apparent certainty closed things down a bit, it felt a bit too narrow.

AI: I think that is a difference between political situations prior to the actual forum and the reporting of them. For Brian Holmes it was a case of introducing NPP to an audience who probably hadn't heard very much, if anything about them before, whereas RTS are very well known in London (particularly after the events of June 18).[1] John Jordan was aware of this, and knew he had to be quite down the line and put his case across in a strong, direct way.

PS: But the practice of RTS appears to result in one-off festivals or moments of disruption—perhaps quite powerful for a short while—but then they end and that's it. Back to the old order of things. RTS repeat an erstwhile successful disruption but NPP look to be much more mobile, trying different approaches, not letting themselves get caught up in one single way of working.

CM: There's also the matter of creating some kind of workable structure or network, RTS seem to have an almost readymade audience of artists or activists but NPP utilise previously untried strategies that involve passers by who might otherwise not have become interested in what NPP were trying to do. The latter is much more community or 'citizen-driven'.

AI: The two groups deal with very different territory, though there's a convergence in that they both try to produce a space within the street, in the centre of the city, where direct action is involved. This fits in with Hakim Bey's idea of the Temporary Autonomous Zone where there's a zone that's open to any kind of behaviour, a temporary permissive society that might last for days, or just for a few hours.[2]

CM: You're right to bring in the idea of the temporary and of the carnivalesque in which the temporary is purely that.[3]

PS: Yes, this temporary nature is mapped out in particular forms. The contrast would be that NPP's work looks open to development but that of RTS manifests itself in a public party, the very existence of which appears to refuse capitalist values but which in fact doesn't really have much momentum.

AI: I think it does have a momentum in that RTS' actions have got bigger every time they've done something, whilst NPP uses both short term and long term strategies. They're involved long-term in projects with nurses' unions or *Sans Papier*[4], and

work with pedagogic structures outside of institutions, with particular goals. RTS usually organise two major events per year. There are specific actions directed against road building or against the City—perhaps they are against Capitalism at large. These are semi-spontaneous actions, but the whole idea is to open up a space in the city, to literally "reclaim the streets" and then allow any behaviour that goes on within this new social/cultural space. RTS take no responsibility for what happens there, they simply appropriate a space.

PS: From what John Jordan was describing, the spaces produced by RTS were akin to Rock festivals. The question that is indirectly raised is "how can an ongoing critical space be established and maintained?" One that isn't immediately recuperated or which is just part of a gallery programme.

AI: Many of the practices involved in *Non-Place Urban Realm* were working to construct and project out into the street, into everyday life, critical spaces originally formed within galleries or other institutions. *Fiambrera* have also done this by literally working in the streets, with and within their own community, in an attempt to directly link debates and actions with people's lives. Marcello Exposito produce video work that involves a mixed public and its memories in an attempt to expand the ways such work might be "consumed" or received. *Mongrel's* projects develop out of workshops where people are given access to video and other equipment that might allow them to represent themselves collectively. In Anna Best's work there is an emphasis upon the blurring of the roles of participant and audience. To what extent these different approaches are able to generate genuinely critical spaces is debatable. The actions carried out by RTS are "hit and run" but they initiate important dialogues, and are, as a consequence of their experimental nature, open to further development. The actions attempt to radicalise public space, to expand upon what might be done there.

CM: An important question is whether or not one can keep such activities radical or critical, since there is such a limited temporal aspect to such interventions.

AI: Also, they are always changing, transforming: increasingly RTS and similar groups are looking at the nature of global capital. June 18 came out of the need to address this, given that the old left-wing model of revolution no longer seems valid—if it ever was. You've got to work on many levels, on the street, through the Internet—there were hackers trying to break into computer systems, just as people were trying to physically occupy the Liffey Exchange. That relates to *Critical Art Ensemble's* view that public space is still there but is being eroded; you can act in that physical space but you need to act in "communication space," in "data space" too.

CM: That's an idea of a concrete rather than a temporal one. To assert that differently, it's almost as if these things don't act all the time in the same way that carnival eventually ceases and order is restored.

PS: And it is a kind of letting-off of steam, as in Bakhtin's idea of carnival, a moment in which the entire society is restructured, overturned even, but then the period of disruption ends. The repressive apparatus becomes even more repressive. I still feel in two minds about the art world being a space in which it is possible to talk about politically radical things and situations but not to actually change things. Walter Benjamin writes about a similar situation in the epilogue to his essay on mechanical reproduction—one is given, in capitalism, a certain freedom of speech but not freedom of action.[5]

AI: But what was positive about the SLG discussions was that there was a continuity of debate, not just one solo event. Several important issues were revisited in subsequent discussions. It's important to situate such exchanges within debates that occur within the media, in the academy, on the Net, at activist meetings, and in other galleries—all these define the field and practice of art and of the political. The good thing is that hopefully both these "fields" can manifest themselves within many different forums and situations. I saw the forums as contributing to ongoing practices, and I think that if you look at the diversity of some of these practices, but also where they converge, then you see that all these things are going to be carried on.

CM: Moving on to a different but related concern, that of experience, away from structures and back to a material base, of direct action or actual experience—can we think of experience as a kind of rupture or a tearing the subject from him or herself?

PS: Is that to imply that there isn't a fixed self, but that unless someone (an "activist" of some kind) creates a rupture people won't realise that there are other possibilities, that they'll stay within the fixed frame of Capitalism? One of my impressions on the day on which Jordan and Holmes spoke was that the audience didn't just consist of art world people. There appeared to be a lot of people there who were interested in holding a critical discussion about Capitalism, who weren't happy with how things are—I know that proving this is another thing again! But you don't need experts in galleries to tell everyone else what's wrong, they already know what's wrong, but how to do something about this might be the point at which some guidance or suggestions might be useful. That's where *Ne Pas Plier* and other active groups are important. The disenchantment is already present, and having nice new Nike trainers, or whatever, isn't going to sort it out.

CM: I want to go back to the notion of the experiential or phenomenological—are these groups trying to set up a context which will allow people to have a different kind of conscious perception of everyday life, through various kinds of suggestion which have nothing at all to do with the marketing of an object (whether an art object or not)?

PS: It's more—a sort of—forcing people into dealing with their embodied selves, an attempt to make people aware of themselves and of the kind of culture they inhabit, in order that this side of things isn't drowned out by the constant hammerings of commodity culture. Holmes was talking about how the extreme liberalism of the left made him want to become, almost, a card-carrying Marxist. Certain positions which had once seemed dogmatic no longer seem so, so much as necessary and critical in the face of an 'anything goes' politics (which is a politics of indifference). Because if you are totally open you are letting certain prevalent sign systems and values occupy that openness. That's what Capitalism seems to do all the time, it fills spaces and censors things by not allowing alternative readings a place.

AI: One of the most important things linking the participants of *Non-Place Urban Realm* is an almost total adherence to the staples of Postmodern theory: plurality, multiplicity, the making of artworks that can be read from several positions simultaneously. It's an opening up into new readings too.

PS: That reminds me of Roland Barthes' essay "Rhetoric of the Image", in which he uses the term "anchorage", referring to how meanings can be allowed to drift, to be relatively open, but not so open that all specific meaning is lost. In the present case we're talking about holding on to meanings that are in serious opposition to Capitalism, are antagonistic to the central trends of culture based, increasingly, on the commodity.[6]

AI: In what Holmes was saying there's almost a notion of the citizen and of basic human rights, and of needing to express a concern for these in the face of governments and business cartels forgetting or effacing these things.

PS: This is like going back to an Enlightenment model of the self, which can sound very old-fashioned in a way but perhaps needs defending.

AI: RTS appear to forget, when they produce their spaces of "delirious" subjectivity some of these things; you're basically in the space of the carnival and your subjectivity isn't stable.

PS: Yes, but there's also a kind of dogmatism in the carnival, only certain kinds of responses are encouraged. Carnival doesn't allow for diversity, it brings along only one model of a "break" with Capitalism—if it's actually a break.

AI: I completely disagree. In such situations you have hundreds of business people photocopying £10 notes and throwing them out the window, which is kind of carnivalesque behaviour but these are people who are supposedly the kind carnival is against.

PS: It's radical for 5 minutes, as it were, I still don't see how that leads to anything more substantial in terms of social change; it's a party mentality: the party stops and everyone sobers up. What kind of space does it create? It doesn't create a space for critical thought, it's a temporary space.

AI: No, I don't think so. There were people there who were interested in getting their issues across, or sitting down and quietly protesting in the road.

CM: I want to bring in the idea of the nomadic. Can you say the nomadic is more transgressive than just squatting somewhere? We've been talking about creating spaces but the forums were concerned with non-space, or "non-place" in the actual title.

PS: Which could be "non-sense".

CM: Well this brings in the idea of the impossible—is a non-space an impossible space? All these people are trying to create space, not a non-space or a negative space.

AI: Non-space is the space that Capitalism produces, economically-produced space. These people who define themselves as in opposition to Capitalism are trying to produce meaningful spaces within the architecture and power of Capitalism.[7]

PS: The meaning of the term seems to be linked to the various different versions of Utopia (as opposed to actually existing things). I suppose that's a problem with what we are talking about—a potential space and not one that's realised; and if it's realised it's just a rupture, it's temporary. There has to be a Utopian strand in all this; by using the imagination, a thinking out of other possibilities.

AI: That's important in terms of Marcello Exposito—the way his video was constructed, and how he works generally, by a constant remapping, to achieve a space that allows for different activities and different lives. He does try to distribute it in a meaningful way, a way that is useful.

PS: There's a long-standing argument that that's what certain types of artists do and have long done, they create models of alternatives, and these models are distributed in the form of a piece of writing or a painting or some other media. For example:art as an alternative realm or a space that's in opposition to Capitalism, even if it is only as a representation or is a device for holding the idea of a possibility. The other thing is to do with Holmes stressing in his talk that NPP weren't just about the imagination, that they were trying to create breaks in the realm of Capitalism, so it's taking that theory further, because you can sit in a room and plan things, or you can write books "forever", but it won't change the actual space. Activism, again, is what's being emphasised as important there.

CM: The way that *Infocentre*[8] work is through the provision of information really—which is also something that the Internet might embody too.

AI: There was the reading room set up in the SLG during the talks. That's the result of a curatorial decision, a relevant one in that it relates to alternative readings of urban space (Psychogeography for example), many of which are to be found in underground publications.

PS: Part of the issue here is the "underground" nature of it. When I was involved with *Here & Now* we'd invite people to meetings and they'd say it wasn't their thing, as though it was a consumer choice. They didn't see discussions of "the political" as their territory, as though they shouldn't have any views on anything they weren't an "expert" on.

CM: There's something implied by the tactics of NPP: it's not overtly political, the politics are masked by something that allows a way in for other people. The problem with underground magazines is distribution, for one thing, but also, they're loaded with a history a lot of people aren't able to grasp: we're sitting here talking about all this because we've been party to a certain didactic availability. This educative aspect is what, in theory, the reading room should be able to achieve, though I don't know whether it actually does that, whereas with NPP the poster is used to achieve that much more.

PS: This suggests that despite the massive power of the spectacle it is still possible to disrupt it with quite simple, traditional means; perhaps sometimes one has to focus upon those means, because they're available, and they can circumvent high-level technology, they're not trapped by that.

AI: Interesting things to bring up are the similarities between the practices of *Mongrel* and *NPP*, in that they both work with communities. *Mongrel* organise workshops very much concerned with new technology, with the idea that such technology can be emancipatory. The quality of the things they put out (which are made in collaboration with a whole range of people) is often very high.

PS: Yes in the text by *Mongrel* [below] they refer to the way that software as it's conventionally structured comes with a readymade idea about how it should be used.

AI: *Mongrel* talk about breaking the frameworks that are built into the software. They hack into this and redesign it so that it can be used in a direct way in schools or other places where they're holding workshops, providing a very, very simplified programme. Then they put it onto the Net.

PS: That's like the NPP thing of stripping the sign of its meaning and then giving it to the user to make something new of it. It's a version of detournement.

AI: And a practical version of that, not one merely in the symbolic realm. This provides the tools for protest—it's what NPP do, really.

PS: At the end of the presentations by Holmes and Jordan, Gustav Metzger asked a question about the relationship between these contemporary forms of disruption or intervention and work by the Constructivists and the other avant garde critical groups of the 20th century. I don't think any of the speakers directly replied to this but it throws up another question: how can issues, modes of knowledge, or skills that you might develop in an art context be reinterpreted and reframed in another context, so that people without any specialist training can nonetheless employ such skills to make something or say something?

AI: Metzger's point was an important one to make and I think he was right to be wary of the cultural amnesia on behalf of certain groups.

PS: Insofar as there was any answer at all to what he said, "no connection" appeared to be the implied "reply." This is a problem with respect to keeping things that challenge Capitalism's conventions going, maintaining a critical position over time, and not letting oppositional forms just peter out. Terms such as "the archive" or "storage" or perhaps even "tradition" or "critical persistence" come to mind here.

AI: There still is a keenness to engage with movements such as Constructivism, though developments in the 1960s are probably more to the fore in the minds of current activists. Constructivism may be tainted for contemporary groups by it being seen as more directly linked to earlier, "outmoded" left-wing politics, but its importance hasn't been lost for those groups that are attempting to bring art and everyday life together, and who are interested in encouraging people to take greater control over their own lives.

PS: Maybe there is an awareness, but how widespread is that awareness? Is it located in only a few left-wing groups or is it "bubbling under the surface" in a much more widespread way? There may be a lot of 'referencing' of radicality going on but it's quite shallow, and doesn't seem to be about picking up certain radical strands and taking them further.

AI: Russian Constructivism is already inscribed in art history. It would be problematic for radical practices to put too much emphasis on appropriating such old forms, which are too close to the Academy.

PS: But one doesn't want those things to be forgotten either. Capitalism constantly brings new things to the fore, certainly in the art world, and that's how the forgetting seems to take place, by an instant obliteration of the past. New books are constantly coming out on Walter Benjamin, now that he has become the subject for numerous Ph.Ds. But what's really important about his work appears to be often missed, i.e. some of his ideas from the 1930s such as his discussion of the Paris arcades, which can be applied to contemporary structures such as shopping centres and to the mass production of commodities. His work isn't "out of date" just because it was carried out 70 years ago. Now that higher education is itself an industry and a business, critical theory has itself become a form of fashion. Fashion is something Benjamin himself discussed,and his ideas are still relevant now. They should be kept and built upon, not just swept away or otherwise lost when Benjamin himself ceases to be a fashionable topic of research.[9]

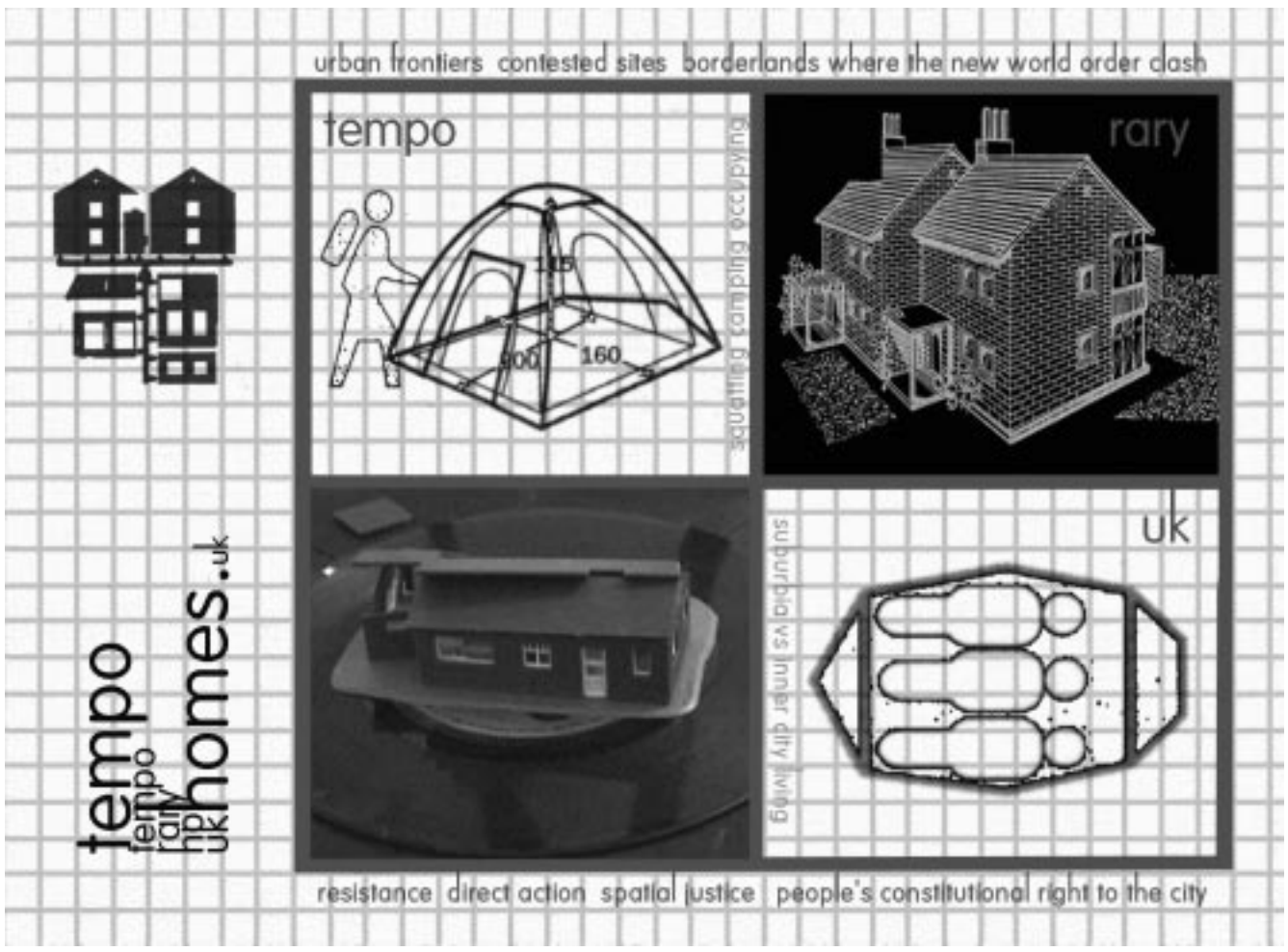
AI: Though there are some very limiting readings of Benjamin there are also some very "enlightened" ones. He is being applied to the current situation: for example there are many theoreticians of the Internet using his work. They're talking about time, progress, experience, all of which Benjamin theorised.

PS: The issues are there, I just get a bit worried that he's been turned into an academic star. Going back to *Mongrel* and technology, more and more Capitalism is promoting the Internet as a new way to do business and go shopping, though the Internet was formerly seen as being anti-establishment, a genuinely democratic means of communication that operated outside of commodity culture (even if it originated as a military technology). The Net is now being reinscribed as a great new shopping arena, and that's quite frightening in a way.

AI: That potential recuperation has been talked about on the Net for some time. It's a case of a given technology not being either inherently emancipatory or inherently repressive: it depends on what you do with it. At the same time new forms of identity—hybrid forms—are being developed (*Mongrel* promote this hybrid form).

PS: New technologies generate new relationships; but, without labouring it too much, isn't that what Constructivism was to a large extent about—new technologies and circumstances producing new possibilities, and presumably a democratisation of things? There's a problem though, in that if you misread Constructivism (as well as other radical stances such as those of De Stijl) you might see them as being involved with a redesigning of Capitalism, as though to just make it a bit nicer or something, and not as a critique of an increasingly entrenched consumer culture (even if that phrase is normally used to refer to more recent developments).

AI: There's an acute understanding of, and willingness to engage, with the contemporary groups we've talked about, with Capitalism, and this is where there is a connection with Constructivism and other early 20th century groups.



PS: In a sense, all you can do is keep breaking at the barrier, as it were, keep trying new approaches, new criticisms in all media, and hopefully you can change things, even if only very slowly.

AI: There were two crucial reasons why I was interested in *Non Place Urban Realm* as a project: the involvement of many critical practices, and the territory around which the involvement takes place (the city and the urban, and the various different critiques dealing with these, from the Surrealists to the Situationists, and beyond this to Net theory).

PS: What aspects of Net theory are important?

AI: Net theory has been responsible for building tools for thinking about the Internet, using Benjamin's work (as we've already mentioned) but also using the metaphor of the city to "think" the Internet.

PS: The contemporary city itself needs a metaphor for it to be able to be thought—it's almost too great a "concept" to grasp mentally. It's a kind of modern sublime.

AI: That's the point! The Internet is supposed to be sublime. That's why we think of it in terms of the unconscious and the city. The SLG talks were good in that they indicated that contemporary radical groupings are aware of earlier critiques of Capitalism and the city: Dada, the Surrealists again—but they have moved on the debates too, and are very engaged with theory. There's an energy and an effort to continue these critiques, but to remember the earlier practice from within a new space and context.

PS: But when Metzger asked that question at the SLG there was, I still feel, an awkward silence; you don't agree?

Anthony Iles and Craig Martin constitute 'What we Call Progress'. Peter Suchin is a painter and critic.

Notes

1. "June 18" refers to the day of disruptions in the City of London in 1999, when a collective formed from diverse activist groups assembled for the "Carnival Against Capitalism", in which RTS played a prominent part. The participants in the present discussion have tried to maintain a broad scope with respect to the issues considered here; however, the talks by Brian Holmes and John Jordan on the 17th August, together with the related public exchanges, recur as a constant reference point throughout the conversation.
2. Hakim Bey, *TAZ: The Temporary Autonomous Zone*, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism, Autonomedia, 1991.
3. References in this discussion to carnival and the carnivalesque draw on ideas found Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*, Indiana University Press, 1984.
4. *Sans Papier* is a movement supportive of immigrants or refugees who are literally "without papers".
5. See *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, Fontana, 1979.
6. "Rhetoric of the Image" is included in Barthes' Image-Music-Text, Fontana, 1977.
7. *On The Production of Space* see the work of that title by Henri Lefebvre, Blackwell, 1991.
8. *Infocentre* was a "drop in" space located in Hackney, London, and co-ordinated by Henrietta Hesse and Jakob Jakobssen. It closed in the summer of 1999, having been in operation for approximately one year.
9. Benjamin's vast but incomplete work on the Paris arcades has recently been translated as *The Arcades Project*, Belknap/Harvard University Press, 1999. It is given a detailed exposition and analysis by Susan Buck-Morss in her book *The Dialectics of Seeing*, MIT, 1989.

A general request was sent out to those involved in the *Non Place Urban Realm* debates to expand upon the discussions held in the gallery. Several responses are included below.

MSDM (Collaborative arts unit)

We titled the video *The Public Art of Campaigning*, and there was a rationale behind this. When we met Elaine in March of this year at Moncrieff Place she was campaigning against a public art project that Southwark Council was using to evict her from the space her business had occupied for over 14 years. Her campaigning methods, combining direct action with site specific intervention in the space, looked to us like an art that is public should be like, bringing the question of democracy into the urban aesthetic debate.

Moncrieff Place is a small plaza in Peckham Rye, which is the main shopping street. In the planner's words, "Moncrieff Place contains the town centre cinema and is one of the main access points from the car park to the town centre, it is a strategic gateway in the town centre's development, without it the town centre does not exist." The street is noted for its mix of high street retailers, and small street markets. It is a mixed area, with many immigrants in a predominantly black neighbourhood. Until now the market traders were licensed to use the site and there are usually two stalls at the entrance to Moncrieff Place.

In the video, people speculate about who will really benefit from the improvements. It is suggested that the cinema is behind the council, pressuring them to invest money embellishing the area. What we suggest is that Moncrieff Place is part of a much wider process of uneven development, and gentrification in particular, that is happening in many large cities. It is a generalised process of deinvestment and reinvestment, of devalorisation and revalorisation of land and property by real estate companies, banks and the state, under the auspices of a return of the middle class back to inner city areas. To areas previously constructed as dangerous, dirty and poor but now being repackaged as safe UEDs: urban entertainment destinations.

However, Moncrieff Place has obtained a new status. It has become a contested site. A space in the heart of the so called global economy where its social cultural and economic oppositions come to light. The Peckham Partnership's delivery plan indicates that by the end of 1997 the Moncrieff works should have been completed. This means that since the commissioning of the project in 1996 the traders succeeded in keeping its status as a contested site. We found that the current project was not the first to be commissioned for Moncrieff. The first project was proposed by Lilian Lin and was a fibre optic sculpture of lights. It was made without any consultation, and the traders were told they would have to move.

The traders started campaigning, collecting signatures, and the council cancelled the plans. In 1998 *Free Form Arts* were commissioned to build public art projects for the area, due to their record with community based approaches. They invited an open call for submissions to be judged by the local community and traders through consultation. The proposals were made public in the Rye Lane chapel, and the *International Carpet of Flowers*, designed by Anne Wiles, was selected.

Briefly, the concept was to create the effect of a red carpet that is rolled out for the premier of a film, in reference to its location in front of the cinema. It would be made of bricks of glass encapsulating flowers and illuminated from below by fibre optics. The flowers would represent the cultures of Peckham and the world developed through workshops at local schools and community groups. In addition the overall plan for Moncrieff Place would include upgrading the building frontages, painting them silver, providing a giant screen for projections and light shows in the front face of the cinema and additional interactive lighting.

When we met Elaine, the planning details were about to go through, to be approved by Southwark property and planning. Elaine was still collecting signatures against the plans and campaigning on the site for the project as she was trading, selling T-shirts in the middle of the winter. The campaign reflected our concerns about peoples' right to the city and because we were interested in theories about the social production of space and the uneven development that occurs under capitalism, for us there was a sense of urgency in starting the video because negotiations were going on between the traders and the council, and the campaign could stop at any time.

A week later the campaign was on hold because the council had made a deal with the traders that they could stay.

When on the following week we interviewed the project manager at the Peckham Partnership, the most recent plans indicated that the traders would be moved to the side, to the wall near Woolworths. That was the day before there would be the meeting at the town hall. We were given a copy of the plans which we shared with Elaine, and that provoked a series of events which led to the committee's disapproval of the Partnership's tactics and ruled in favour of the traders keeping their places. The latest news is that the project is going back into consultation.

The most interesting aspect is that the Moncrieff case is not an isolated phenomena in Peckham or even in the borough. With massive urban development come other contested sites, other groups of people campaigning against their evictions, usually in response to a specific redevelopment project such as in Moncrieff Place. We can mention a few cases included in what we call the 'contested sites' database, including: 1-51 Peckham High Street, the Tooley Street residents, the East Dulwich estate residents, the Crystal Palace Park campaigners, the 121 in Brixton, and finally the group of homeless people living in the Bullring, Waterloo.

It's all part of the gentrification of South London whose infrastructure appears now as a multiplicity of UED projects, including the Millennium Dome, the London Eye, Imax cinema, Jubilee Gardens, Tate gallery, UCI at Crystal Palace Park and more specifically in Peckham, the Arch, the Pulse, the Zoetrobe, the new library and now Moncrieff Place, taking its cue from larger UED's that have become trendy in the USA and across the world. Barcelona for example is the model for Lord Rogers' and John Prescott's Urban Task force.

If we look at the development of Peckham we see all the characteristics of an emerging fantasy city specifically its 'themo-centrism' and solipsism in creating an environment of illusion that ignores what's happening in its own neighbourhood, that ignores hopelessness, unemployment, social injustice, evictions, while transforming sites into promotional spaces. In the video the city officials talk about the overall look, divided into themes of colour, light and animation used to create a new identity for the town centre.

Another concern is that these fantasy cities are the culmination of a long term trend in which private space replaces public space. The majority of large scale UED initiatives are created by public development agencies in joint business with private partners from the real estate and entertainment industry. In the case of Peckham, from the £31 million budget for improvements to the town centre £18.3 million (more than 50%) comes from the private sector. We know that these private investors will have control over what the streets look like, who will be allowed in and what kind of activities will go on there.

That's why we should be able to place the aesthetic debate about the *International Carpet of Flowers* within the context of broader struggles over the meaning of democracy. All of the rhetoric around the redevelopment of public spaces invokes the idea of the unitary public sphere, characterised by its inclusiveness and openness, even though it is structured more by exclusions and attempts to erase the traces of these exclusions.

The enclosure of flowers in glass bricks symbolising all communities, represent social space as a substantial unity and is in itself a fantasy that contains its own spatial politics. Our concern is that it legitimises the exclusion of anyone that destabilises that form of representation. In the video we can see the rhetoric of democracy, mobilised by the city officials when they talk about a town for everybody, but this is in itself an authoritarian voice, and a nostalgic image of space because in the reality, we can not recover what we never had. Our interest in Elaine's campaign was precisely what we interpret as a confrontation with this authoritarian vision of a unitary social space, and a counter image to the redevelopment. Employing slogans like "stalls on, art off", the entrance to Moncrieff Place was transformed into a strategic frontier, forcing the people as well as the city officials to testify to a conflict they are trying to conceal. Campaigns like these can disclose the evictions that occur when theme projects are presented as symbols of social cohesion. It would be good not to think of public space as a theme park pre-packaged for users, but as a result of the practice or counter-practice by people in their daily life.

Non space urban action

Adam Scrivener

(Member of the group *Inventory*)

The SLG is a quite a big space and it was interesting, if somewhat ironic, to observe its compartmentalisation for the show *Non Place Urban Realm*. The show was an interesting and worthwhile one; and yet an opportunity was missed. The SLG is an art gallery and whatever goes on in there it remains so. This is due to its architectural purpose, the economy, and power structures that support and maintain it. In short, it too is an example of how space is produced. It is a blank space, a non-space, an available container for art. Therefore the show could have tackled this by making the space more widely available to a greater number of people who didn't necessarily come from fine art backgrounds. Perhaps this expanded field of contributors would have ignored these spatial and aesthetic conventions, and would have made more of the locality, the architecture, its symbolised interior, by putting it into service of completely differing and heterogeneous agendas.

It is a question of theory and praxis. J18, for example, was extremely worthwhile as a carnivalesque action although few ideas were communicated. In fact, with the amount of video cameras wielded that day, it seemed as if documentation had overtaken agency and idea. Moreover, they have attempted to build on that day's events by creating a post-mortem document for the Anarchists' Bookfair—rather than integrating this self-reflexive critique into the action in the first place. Likewise, most art shows plonk their work into some gallery or public space and then "talk about it" after the fact. Rarely is there an artwork made that has an on-going sociality, or political imperative—projects start and they also finish. The circus comes to town and then it goes away again leaving some glossy memento mori in its wake.

An awareness of the production of space is a political and social consciousness that, like other themes of revolutionary critique, is concerned with the transformation of everyday life—of being here and now—its object is immaterial. Change can only occur through the continuous attempt to initiate experiments, autonomous productions, and direct interventions which are not only underpinned by theory and critique but are constantly responsive to the people they are encouraging and the situations they are addressing.

Forms and platforms for communication and exchange are necessary for collective action; this is why the talks at Non Place seem to have been more successful than its exhibits. Yet we should not be sidetracked by yet more objects of contemplation, more documents and videos. We should be moving toward an unmediated, restless, collective movement of idea and action intertwined, which is simultaneously active and reactive, spawning a force that will smash this puny existence once and for all.

Fiambrera in its Place

Fiambrera

(artist/activist group based in Spain)

Fiambrera were not scheduled to talk at *Non Place Urban Realm*, we just happened to be there and had to perform as a kind of substitute. It is funny, since that is quite our "ethos" generally, we "just happen to be somewhere" and just assume the consequences of that "being there".

Now that we come to consider it, we do not usually happen to be in art galleries, museums or places of that kind, and not because we belong to any sort of irreducible radical tribe, but possibly just because we happen to be somewhere else... somewhere else where usually, and it is not our fault, there's conflict going on, there are evictions going on, there are nasty things going on.

By definition, a fiambrera has never been in a no-place. A fiambrera is the Spanish word for lunchbox: the group adopted the name after frequenting gallery openings and finding that they could fill up their fiambreras with food for the week.

Intervening The City A Proposal for an Alternative Forum and a "Sustainable" City Falling Down to Pieces.

Last February in Seville a "Euromediterranean Conference on Sustainable Cities" was organised by Seville City Council, and since they did not invite anyone else apart from professional politicians and developers, we had to organise something of our own.

There were alternative meetings, conferences and the like... and there was a *Fiambrera* proposal to join some people and work on other level. We choose La Alameda, a barrio [district] in the centre of Seville, with all the predictable circumstances: years of abandonment, bad housing and a growing rate of evictions as a preparation for a massive assault of developers and gentrifiers.

We were some 60 people and had some 30,000 pesetas (£150). We organised 5 groups and worked on different issues, trying to relate all of the results. It was of central importance to be able to offer a common image for the whole alternative forum, something that was cheap, effective, politically significant, and aesthetically well built. After observing our surroundings we came to this:

"Si 8 Do", is more or less the contrary of the official motto of the Sevilla Council, "No 8 Do", which must be read as "Thou have not abandoned me" and it is a reference to a distinction that some medieval king gave to Seville.

The motto is on absolutely everything in Seville: buses, uniforms, street posts... and quite obviously ours means "thou have abandoned me". We started using these little flags with the changed motto, just by placing them on every dog-shit we found in the street, and there were hundreds of them.

Fiambrera should register the "dog-shit index" as a sociological and urbanistic tool to detect the availability of green areas (none at all in our barrio) and the degree of abandonment of a district (months and months without any cleaning brigade).

Of course this action was widely commented on by the local press and among the neighbours who had to realise how their barrio was subject to a scheduled degradation and how evictions would soon be following. In this aspect and as soon as we started working in the barrio we discovered some places where people would know what we were talking about more quickly.

That was the case with the Calle Arrayan, a narrow street leading to the barrio market. A narrow street that was threatened by a big wall, some ten metres high, that had been falling to pieces for years (in Seville some months before a similar wall had fallen suddenly and killed several people).

We decided to organise something there, and together with the neighbours we came to the concept of "experimental wall": a wall whose falling onto the people crossing the street would be used to test some security systems against falling walls: plastic helmets for instance.

So we got our plastic helmets, put the Si 8 Do motto on them (people already recognised the same initiative as in the dog-shit flags: los de las mierdas! los de las mierdas!) and we arranged two tables at each end of the street, so when anybody went through that street he/she would be asked kindly, on behalf of the city council, to wear the helmet while passing through, just in case the wall fell over.

The reactions would vary widely: from obedience, to insults to the supposed council members offering the helmets... till they realised about the Si 8 Do motto... After the days working there, the most important result to us has been the creation of autonomous groups able to deal with some of the tools we introduced.

So, on the commonly saturated environment of the barrio, it was easy to realise how many yellow boards there were. They announced the supposed agreement to build low-cost houses, and had been there for over a year without any result. So one of our groups started interfering with them systematically with an interval of some days between them. That led us into a massive media campaign and a debate on the housing policy in La Alameda.

To prevent evictions from happening easily, we started working on one of the most present (and hateful) council campaigns, one that used these boards: Which came to mean: "If you are not registered: you are nobody." We got some of the original posters and worked out this other which says: "You may well be registered, and even so you are nobody when gentrification comes."

This has been a tool ever since used by the evictions alarm committee organised by people in La Alameda. Sometimes it has gained us some crucial minutes in which to contact other people and get stronger, effectively avoiding evictions.

http://www.lanzadera.com/mortadela

Technologies of Location

Mongrel

(Hybrid group working with art and technology)

Forgetting the invisible city is a normality for most of us, a common sense that can help amass someone an empire, a small business or, as in Bristol, transport people half way around the world against their will. This forgetting offers us a temporary blindness that allows us to go about our daily business, walking past the sick, the homeless or the building built on glories that meant other people's pain.

In the same way that we forget the map and remember the journey, we also forget the software that wrote this text. Software exists in some form of invisible shadow world of process something like the key we find in maps. Software is establishing models by which things are done yet, like believing the objectivity of maps, we forget that software is derived from certain cultural positions. Software can never just be a tool; it is always culturally and politically positioned, and part of this positioning is the invisibility of the software in construction.

We follow our menu items like we follow our maps moving from place to place transfixed by the representation we see before us, while seeing nothing of the social geographies from which they were derived and on which they act. We ignore the built-in cultural and political bias—the implicit totalitarianism of prescribed menu options—instead we are transfixed by the outcome of our interaction with applications. We forget the program in order to get on with the task.

Although maps depict what is actually visible, they also visualise what is invisible in everyday experience and through the selectivity of the mapmaker certain elements are shown and given relative importance whilst others are not. The map is an abstract visual composition, a view from a vertical rather than horizontal plain, usually drawn at a constant scale across its surface.

Software attempts to visualise and structure creative processes and procedures along instrumental lines. It objectifies the invisible cultural constructs within the work, reducing it to a series of binary choices that are hierarchically defined. This is an everyday experience, and through the selectivity of the programmer certain elements are shown and given relative importance whilst others are not.

This series of statements explains something of the apparent objectivity we feel when looking at a map. It is also a pointer toward why this graphic illusion of our urban space is so compelling over and above its use as a method of knowing where we are and where we are going. It is also obvious that maps present only one possible version of the Earth's surface, an edict fiction constructed from factual observation. This fiction maps itself onto the cities exterior—the city image as a mediated concept, the city as seen from elsewhere.

The modern map presupposes a certain world view, a specific style of visual geography, one that takes a kind of birds-eye view. The map is a scale drawing not an exact reproduction. The map is a symbolic representation by an agreed set of symbols figures, lines and shading.

Software also presupposes a certain world-view, a specific set of visual devices such as menu names and items like File, Edit, View, and their subsets; Cut; Paste, Save, Save As, Open and so on. These represent a specific style of visual geography of the creative processes that acts as a distance to its subject. Software is a systematic modelling of the creative process not an exact reproduction of that process. Software is a symbolic representation of creative processes by a culturally agreed set of symbols menu items and processes of interaction.

Harwood/*Mongrel*

Marcello Exposito

(Artist)

October in the North: Storm from the Northwest (A videotape, 92 minutes, 1995) is a project which was undertaken as part of "puente de pasaje", a programme of 12 artist interventions which took place in Bilbao during 1995. It was produced by Carta Blanca, commissioned by Corinne Diserens and co-ordinated by Franck Larcade. The project did not simply entail producing a videotape, but also designing its own mode of distribution. The tape is a synthesis between audio-visual material and varying modes of representation which spring from diverse social, cultural and political sources. These sources include those drawn from heterogeneous symbolic constructions, contrasting and occasionally antagonistic. Copies of the videotape, in domestic format, can be found stored and made accessible to the public in diverse, often unconnected, archives and video libraries. In this way distinct social groups have free access to the work, in which they find images and recognisable forms of self-representation recontextualised through a complex, multi-faceted audio-visual device. The work was first shown in Bilbao at the "puente: seminario internacional", an interdisciplinary event dedicated to analysing the transformation of industrial cities in the so-called "Atlantic Axis".

The following text (originally published in *hika*, an independent Basque magazine which concentrates on contemporary thought and politics) gave an account of the project and announced its availability to the public.

October in the North: Storm from the Northwest actively refuses to offer a standardised map in any geographical, temporal, historical or social sense; quite the reverse. Instead, it chooses to dismantle preconceived cartographies. I see it as a critical reading of partial aspects of a concrete geographical, urban and social environment. It deals essentially with a discontinuous journey across time and space via fragments of social and urban landscapes in transformation, but in no way attempts to present any type of globalised or systematic overview or cartographies.

The videotape revolves around a central leitmotiv in the visual representations of what is known as Greater Bilbao: the journey down the length of the Ria (the river) from the heart of the great city out towards the sea. The journey outlined in "Puerto de Bilbao" (Port of Bilbao, a film dating from 1920 attributed to the Azkona brothers, restored and preserved by the Filmoteca Vasca) is inter-cut, opposed and deconstructed at various points throughout its originally linear and descriptive narrative. It is a metaphorical dispersal and fragmentation brought to bear upon a physical, temporal and historical axis. Another dimension is added to the institutional and media representation of the demolition of the last cranes in Bilbao's Abandoibarra [the urban area which is been redeveloped around Guggenheim-Bilbao Museum and Euskalduna Palace]. It allows us to read the loss of physical spaces within the old industrial city—where social and class antagonisms were made visible—as a metaphor of the symbolic dissolution of the central character of the proletariat as social subject in the conflict between capital and labour under the classic Leftist view. Later on, breaking down the barriers of temporal distance, the vision of an industrial landscape in ruins and on the point of annihilation runs parallel to and can be confused with the same landscape decades earlier, incomplete and still in progress.

Storm from the Northwest: a final metaphor, at the end of the proposed journey; the waves lashing against the breakwater remind us of other waves used to symbolise the unstoppable advance of the revolution (in Eisenstein's "Potemkin"). Turbulent October weather conditions (Basque poet Gabriel Celaya: "Everything is terribly sad, and so beautiful!") overlap with the events of October 1984 which saw the civil unrest in Euskalduna. Engineering, meteorology and the techniques and technologies for the control and domination of natural forces (Marcuse: the domination of man over man "through" the domination of nature) are aligned with the technocratic imaginary of a futuristic Bilbao. There is an extended prologue and epilogue which centre on the mining district, the hub which generated the staggering amounts of capital which, in the hands of the local bourgeoisie, supported the industrial development of the region, through the systematic and insatiable exploitation of human and natural resources.

There are many ways to read and recount history. Almost always, the most suspect is that which is disseminated by those who control and impose the narrative mechanisms; those who decide who should speak, when and to what ends. Santos Zunzunegui at the beginning of the tape, tells about the work of the historian being like a work of montage. There are many alternative experiences and readings of History, as well as personal and collective (hi)stories which deserve to be told, heard and remembered. I want to say that opposing the dominant narratives is above all a political task, that some of us have decided to take this on by rearranging sounds and images. To resist hegemonic narrative methods and offer a different arrangement of sounds and pictures is to truly contribute to the possibility of a collective and alternative reorganisation of experience. I mean this in the sense that Goddard says that those who work with images move in occupied territory—and in occupied territory one must choose to be part of the resistance. Or in the sense that Deleuze states that an act of resistance has two sides: under the form of an artwork, under the form of human struggle—this is without doubt one of the ways one can connect art with life.

It pleases me immensely that my work provokes so many questions, but only in as much that I can respond with many others. Gallarta is a village which grew up at the foot of the mines in the shadow of the pit workings. Old Gallarta was demolished during the 60s and 70s in order to continue the mining there. Due to the protests of some of its inhabitants, the authorities gave in to the building of the new village, as it stands, nearby. On the site of the original village there is now an immense hole. It is salutary to consider the visual contrast between this impressive crater in the earth and the monumental presence of the new architecture in the future institutional Greater Bilbao, somewhat utopian and overblown. Or the contrast between the large figures that adorn the technocratic dream of a perfectly controlled socio-economic development and the smaller ones that inhabit people's daily work and their strategies for survival. Or the gulf between the diverse ways that different people and social groups read images and history.

Marcelo Expósito, Bilbao/Valencia, October 1995/ February 1996. Translated by Anna Milsom.